

Application Number: 22/002

Nominated Asset: Summertown United Reformed Church (URC)

Site Address: 294A Banbury Road, Summertown, Oxford

Ward: Summertown

Applicant: The Summertown Arts Community (SAC)

Recommendation: The Head of Planning Services is recommended to:

1. Agree that the Nominated Asset should be confirmed as an Asset of Community Value
2. Agree to include the asset on the City Council's Register of Local Assets of Community Value Register and place the asset on the Local Land Charge Register.

Background to Report.

1. The Localism Act and the Assets of Community Value Regulations set out the opportunities and procedures to follow for communities wishing to identify assets of community value and have them listed.
2. The City Council is able to list a nominated asset if, in its, opinion:

An actual current use of the building or other land that is not an ancillary use furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community; AND

Is it realistic to think that there can continue to be non-ancillary use of the building or other land that will further (whether or not in the same way) the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

OR

There is a time in the recent past when an actual use of the building or other land that was not ancillary use furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community; AND

It is realistic to think that there is a time in the next five years when there could be non-ancillary use of the building or other land that would further (whether or not in the same way as before) the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

3. These definitions have been taken from the Government's Regulations. There is no national guidance as to what the key terms in these definitions mean. It is for the nominating organisation in the first instance to argue why it considers the nominated asset meets the definition in the Regulations.
4. If the owner objects to their property being placed on the List, they have a right in the first instance to an internal review by the City Council of this decision.

Nomination

5. The Summertown Arts Community (SAC) submitted a nomination for the inclusion of the Summertown United Reformed Church (URC) and its ancillary buildings on the Council's register of Assets of Community Value. The nomination letter was received by Oxford City Council via email on 4 July 2022. A plan of the nominated area is attached to this report.
6. The SAC has argued that the church is an asset of community value on the following grounds:
 - a) In light of the urgent need in Oxford for suitable spaces for creative artists in theatre, music, dance and visual arts, as well as places for local communities to participate in and enjoy such activities, the nominators consider that the Summertown URC provides a high quality facility in a well connected location. It supports numerous arts classes and groups both amateur and professional as well as providing a space for worship, and enriching the community both locally and city wide.
 - b) The activities hosted by the church already serve the social wellbeing, health and interests of the Summertown community by making participatory arts activity such as dance and art classes locally available for all members of the community.
 - c) The Summertown URC held its last worship service in May 2022. Loss of this valuable space for arts and community use would be detrimental to the wellbeing of the local community, and will particularly impact Oxford's provision for performing arts as it perpetuates the reduction of suitable rehearsal or outreach spaces. It would also be damaging to the local self-employed individuals and small organisations that hire the premises, leading to loss of income.
 - d) The nomination provides a list of organisations and community groups who have been regular users of the premises and ancillary buildings, including:
 - Ros Elliott (resident artist)
 - Ballet in Small Spaces
 - Drawing Dance
 - Oxford Dance Forum
 - Ségolène Tarte for Oxford Academy of Dance

- Marianna Vellopoulou School of Dance
- Cathy Landell-Mills Art classes
- Oxford Caledonian Pipes and Drums
- Oxford Theatre Guild
- Oxford City Council (as a polling station)

Response to consultation

7. The freehold for the premises is held by the Wessex Trust of the Wessex Synod of the United Reformed Church, who were informed via their Property team. No response has been received as at the time of writing.

Assessment

8. The SAC is the nominating group and is currently unincorporated, although they are working towards formal status. All members are resident in the Oxford area and have a local connection to the nominated site. The nomination meets the requirements section 5c of the Regulations.
9. The Regulations require the City Council to consider whether the Summertown United Reformed Church meets the definition of an Asset of Community Value as set out in section 88 of the Localism Act, i.e. in this case that it is currently, or in the recent past has been, in a use that furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community, and also that it is realistic to think that there can continue to be non-ancillary use of the building or other land which will further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community (whether or not in the same way).

Whether the current use furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community

10. The primary function of the church premises was to host religious services, however the premises also hosted events, activities for the purposes of catering to the needs and well-being of the local community. As described the buildings making up the site were used in non-ancillary manner that provides facilities that can be used for specific activities, as well as the wider community for public and private events. These characteristics are considered to in and of themselves bring about benefits by fostering social interaction and wellbeing on an individual and community level, which are deemed to meet the criteria as set out in the Act.

Whether it is realistic to think that there can continue to be non-ancillary use of the building or other land which will further (whether or not in the same way) the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

11. Although church services are no longer being held on the premises, the nominating group have entered into an interim arrangement with the freeholders that allows access and continued use of the premises until the end of the year. It is on the understanding that SAC will take responsibility for maintenance and upkeep during the period.
12. The nominating group have also indicated that they are making active enquires into placing a bid to purchase the premises with the view towards retaining it for community use. The nomination does not include a fundraising proposal or business plan, although they have indicated that they are receiving professional advice in exploring the potential for a bid as well as their incorporation as a formal body.
13. There is continuity of community usage on the site despite its closure for church services and with consideration of the active efforts of the SAC to retain these uses, it is realistic to envisage continued use within a reasonable future time scale.
14. The proposed activities will be of benefit to the local community and will contribute to individual and social well-being. It will also provide amenity and facilities to other community groups with limited access to working spaces and can address a potential deficit in community amenity spaces locally.

Decision

I confirm that:

Nominated Asset: Summertown United Reformed Church (URC)
Site Address: 294A Banbury Road, Summertown, Oxford

Should be an Asset of Community Value and included on the City Council's Register of Local Assets of Community Value Register and placed on the Local Land Charge Register.

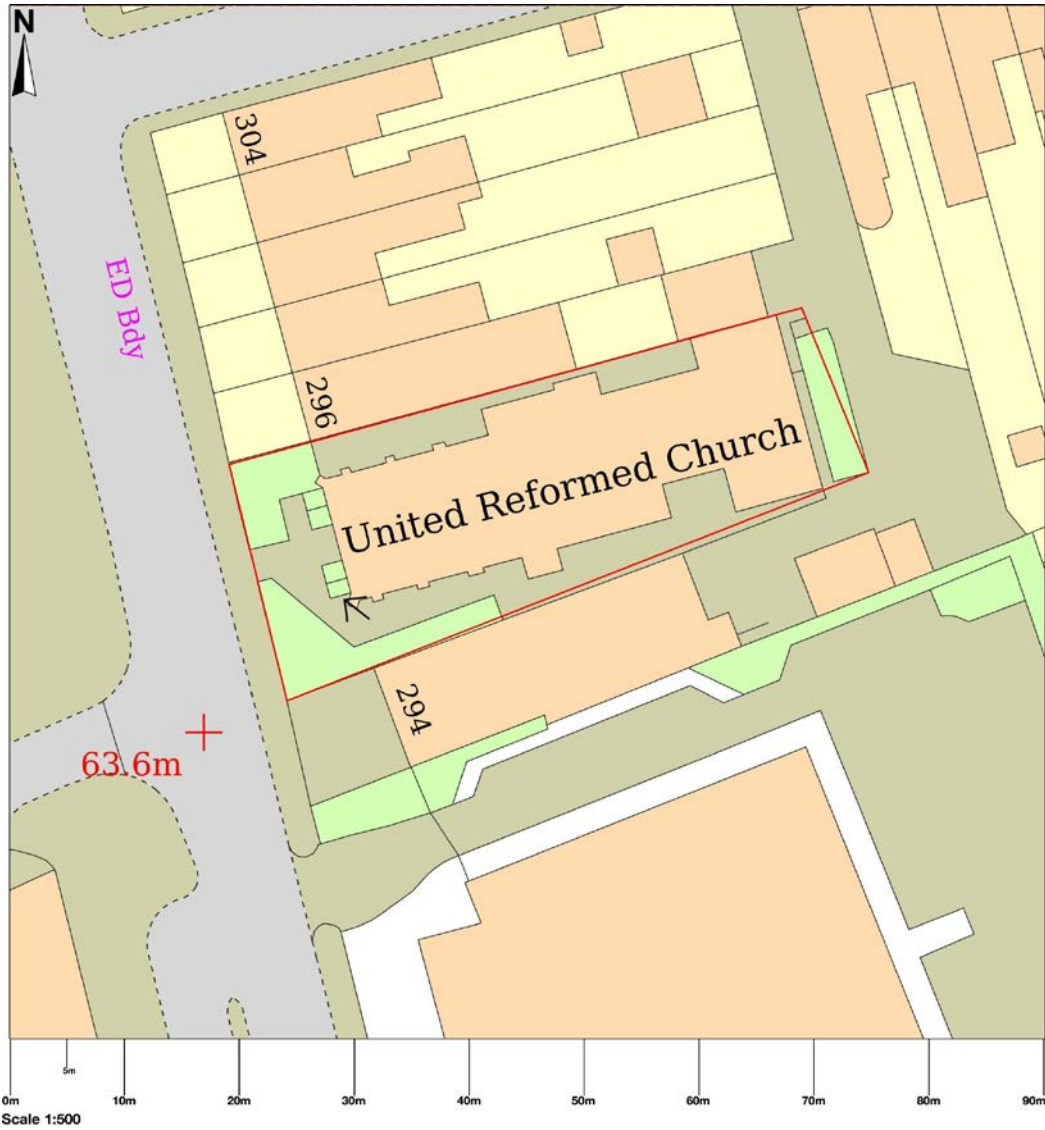
Name: Tom Bridgman
Title: Executive Director – Development



Signature:
Date: 090922

Background Papers: Nomination letter, Site location map

Contact Officer: Arome Agamah
Extension: x2360
Date: 12 August 2022



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